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Eaton, M., & Pereira da Silva, C. (1997). Portugal's Child Workers. *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 10(3), 160-169.

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

**Published in:**  
International Journal of Iberian Studies

**Publication Status:**  
Published (in print/issue): 01/01/1997

**Document Version**  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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# Portugal's Child Workers Martin Eaton and Carlos Pereira da Silva

The prevalence of working children in Portugal is a controversial issue. Up to 200,000 under fourteen-year olds are now employed illegally in labouring activities as diverse as stone-breaking and shoe-shining. The phenomenon is most visible in the textile, clothing and footwear industries of the north-western region around Oporto. Drawing on a series of interviews, this article examines the role of Portuguese child workers. It looks at their contribution to the industrial development process, evaluates the dilemmas facing the children, and assesses the likelihood of recent short-term answers being successful. In the longer term, it is argued that solutions will be based upon an improved national education system, and a greater knowledge of innovative working practices among key companies.

## Child working in Europe.

The use of children as young as nine or ten to work for a wage is a well known and contentious issue. By its nature, child work is an illegal but also a financially important activity in many parts of the world. Guestimates as to the extent of the phenomenon vary, but a conservative figure suggests that by the mid-1990's there were approximately 83 million child workers worldwide. Of these, between two and three million could be found in the developed world.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, child work is just one segment of a much wider and increasingly sophisticated and unregulated employment economy that has proliferated throughout the European Union (EU).<sup>2</sup> Examples can be found in the United Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> For instance, it could be argued that school children doing paper rounds or selling vegetables by the roadside represent British forms of child labour. Nonetheless, the phenomenon is open to European-wide interpretations of what does and does not constitute the employment of children. In the UK, children would normally work for a few hours, besides attending school. However, and as we shall see later, in Portugal many children simply work and do not attend school beyond an elementary level. Theoretically, there is a dilemma here, and the question is: at what point does a child's job change from being a useful supplementary experience to one of gross exploitation, suffering and subsequent impediment? The key word in this instance is 'exploitation'. Save the Children Fund believes that exploitation exists where children are 'paid too little, their hours are too long, the work is too hard, too dull and too dangerous, and where they work under slave-like arrangements'.<sup>4</sup> In turn, slavery is a mode of production in which individuals are owned commodities and are denied any control over their own work. In this situation, child labour represents unprotected employment in one of its most anachronistic forms. Furthermore, and as an echo of the conditions associated with the Industrial Revolution, these informal and unregulated labour market

1. UNICEF, *The Progress of Nations*, Oxford: OUP, 1995.
2. E. Mingione, 'Labour Market Segmentation and Informal Work in Southern Europe', *European Urban and Social Studies*, 2 (2), 1995, pp. 121-143.
3. M. Lavelette et al., 'Child Employment in Britain: Policy, Myth and Reality', *Youth and Policy*, 47, 1995, pp. 1-15.
4. Central Broadcasting Community Affairs, *Children in Danger*, Birmingham: CBCA, 1995.

The scale of the Portuguese situation is remarkable because in spite of its undergrowth status,<sup>8</sup> childwork is now a structural feature of several localised Portuguese economies.<sup>9</sup> The Portuguese public are aware of the existence of child labouring but in spite of this 'visibility', there has been little research carried out. Data given in Table 1 shows a range of 24,500 - 28,500 children between the ages of twelve and fourteen at work in 1991. Observation confirms that these children were working in factories, cafes, markets, building sites, quarries, bakeries, and on small farms. In the same year, the International Labour Office (ILO) claimed a total of 63,000 Portuguese children under the age of fourteen at work. As recently as July 1993, the Portuguese General Workers Union (UGT) put forward a figure of 150,000.<sup>10</sup> Other studies have suggested that a total of 200,000 children<sup>11</sup> were working illegally. The differences between the figures are alarming and chronicled by the media, trade unions and non-governmental organisations - NGOs - rather than by rigorous academic research. They reflect a failure to recognise and a reluctance to understand the problem. However, what is indisputable is that child labour in this outwardly modernising Western European economy does exist.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, it cannot continue to be ignored by the Portuguese Government on the grounds of individual and/or familial freedom that allows parents to choose how some children earn their livelihoods. We are, after all, talking about children as young as seven or eight who are helping to maintain one of the EU's growing industrial economies of the 1990s.

### Portugal's working children

Portugal provides a special case for a detailed analysis of the role of children in industrial and labour market development processes. This article examines the extent of children working in Portugal in the 1990s. It outlines their role in the textiles, clothing and footwear (TCF) manufacturing sectors, and attempts to explain the consequences of the phenomenon. In a study of this kind it is difficult to collect evidence through any conventional field methodology. Indeed, those who have tried have faced verbal and physical abuse.<sup>13</sup> We are, therefore, forced to rely on personal observations, second-hand allegations and empirical analysis based upon anecdotal media reactions and informal face-to-face interviews. This is not an ideal situation because the responses outlined below are biased and need to be considered carefully. There is a dilemma, for example, between moral indignation and often the practical inevitability associated with children going out to work (i.e. their alternatives are limited). This article, therefore, discusses short-term solutions to the problem, and concludes with longer-term courses for action designed to alleviate the child labouring phenomenon.

done in earlier years. encourage their children to work, and to do as they, and their own parents, had 'productive labourers' is often powerful. In this instance, parents are keen to in situations of strong paternalism, the pressure for youngsters to become to accepted cultural and economic traditions is an important one. This is because working lives will develop from an early age. Moreover, the process of conforming such a situation, individuals have been free to choose the manner in which their adopted a laissez-faire attitude allowing child workers to remain undetected. In appeared willing to either control and/or regulate the problem. Many have industrial economies.<sup>14</sup> Alongside this proliferation, few EU governments have arrangements have been reappearing with increasing frequency in many advanced

5. "Netherlands: Illegal Child and Youth Labour", *European Industrial Relations Review*, 179, 1988, p. 6.
6. Karl Marx, quoted in S. Padover, (ed), *Karl Marx on Education, Women and Children*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1975.
7. "Portugal: BBC Attacked while Filming Child Labour", *European Industrial Relations Review*, 179, 1988, p. 7.
8. E. Miguelez-Lobo, "Irregular Work in Portugal", in CoECs, *Underground Economy and Irregular Forms of Employment* (trial and error), CoECs, Luxembourg, 1990.
9. E. Nash, "Portugal's children reap bitter harvest", *The Independent*, 17 October 1995.
10. B. Simões, "Childhood is all sold out", *The Guardian*, 2 July 1993.
11. A. Frean, "Europe's 200,000 sad slave children", *The European*, 78, 1991.
12. A. Williams, "The Portuguese Economy in Transition", *ACIS Journal*, 5 (1), 1992, pp. 30-39.

generations.

existed and been locally accepted among poorer social classes for several be acknowledged too that it is difficult to eliminate a work practice that has the controlling authority - the Portuguese Labour Department (PLD). It must workers<sup>16</sup> have also made their detection a much more hazardous prospect for intimidations are frequent factors. Inconsistencies in the definition of 'child equally rare. In fairness, evasion of the authorities is relatively easy, a conspiracy largely ineffective; detection of child workers and prosecutions of employers Meanwhile, Portuguese legislative measures to tackle the problem have been geographical issue will continue to be ignored.

government. That embarrassment makes it unlikely that child labour as a socio-spite of these events, the child-working question has embarrassed the Portuguese boycotting the country's important manufacturing exports. Nevertheless, and in complaints are seen as an orchestrated campaign by other EU members aimed at the improved performance of the Portuguese economy in the 1990s. Indeed, the recent television programmes on the issue were manipulative and biased against Moreover, the former Social Democratic (PSD) Government contended that child working during ... numerous visits to companies in the north of Portugal.<sup>15</sup> Trade, Neto da Silva, on the other hand, has claimed that he 'never saw one and called for its complete eradication.<sup>14</sup> A former Secretary of State for Overseas condemned the use of child labour. He labelled it 'a national shame and disgrace', has sometimes been confused. For instance, former President, Mario Soares, then has failed to make a major response to the children's plight. Official reaction limited.<sup>13</sup> The State has been reluctant to acknowledge its existence, and even Government reaction to the reporting of child-working in the media has been

### Official State responses

Table 1. Number of 12-14 year olds employed in Portugal by sex - 1991.

Note: In 1991 the legal minimum working age was 14, whereas the maximum compulsory education age was, until 1987, only 12. Adolescents who were not carrying on with their education had a legal loophole, therefore, which let them devote the intervening two years to illegal working. Despite the legislative change it appears that this practice continued in 1991.

Source: INE (1993)

PLANNING REGIONS	General Numbers Employed		Number of 12-14 Year Olds Employed	
	Total	M	F	Total
Northern	18894	10034	8860	16691
Central	4400	2677	1723	3487
Lisbon/Tagus Valley	3158	2069	1089	2804
Alentejo	548	388	160	459
Algarve	291	199	92	260
Madeira	522	378	144	431
Azores	740	616	124	587
Portugal	28553	16361	12192	24719
				14052
				10667

13. "Tourism steals children from the schools", *Diário de Notícias*, 3 May 1991; fines before being taken to court over child-workers", *Expresso*, 4 October 1991.
14. "Portugal: Forum on Child Labour", *European Industrial Relations Review*, 190, 1989, p.8.
15. "No child labour says official", *Anglo-Portuguese News*, 19 September 1991.
16. International Labour Office, "Portugal: New Child Labour Regulations Challenged", *International Labour Review*, 132, 1993, pp.425-426.

## Portugal and the European labour market

In seeking explanations for working children in Portugal the labour cost factor should not be underestimated. The European Commission confirms that one important advantage of Portugal's labour market has been its persistently low labour costs for manufacturing.

In 1991, for example, the average monthly cost of employing a male manual manufacturing worker in the Community was 1,850 ecus. Portugal's, at almost three times less with 600 ecus per month, was the lowest.<sup>17</sup> In turn, average monthly labour costs in the textile, clothing and footwear sectors were among the lowest of all Portuguese industries.<sup>18</sup> Labour costs for clothing workers, for example, were approximately 58,417/£243 per month. Normally, between 75 and 80 per cent of the total labour cost will represent an outlay on wages. It is plausible, therefore, that adult clothing workers have been earning around 46,750/£195.00 per month – a very poor salary. Children, of course, offer an opportunity for the lowest of the low wages to be paid. Estimates suggest that some Portuguese children have worked for around 10 per cent of an adult worker's wage.<sup>19</sup> The inference from the above figures is that children in the clothing industry may only be getting paid approximately 4,675/£19.50 a month. They are, therefore, extremely cheap workers, and are vulnerable, exploited, and exposed to precarious working conditions that can lead to serious injury, sometimes even death.<sup>20</sup> Few have recourse to legislative protection in cases of disablement. Surprisingly, and in spite of these drawbacks, the compliant attitude of the children and their willingness to work have led to an increase in the numbers employed. As a result, the Portuguese child-working issue is much more complicated than we might have thought, and this leads to a second factor.

## The Europeanisation of Portugal's textile, clothing and footwear exports

Child workers have a key role in the manufacturing production process in Portugal. This is because there will always be a final product that will be sold on for a profit in the international marketplace. Given the restricted size and purchasing power of the domestic market, gaining a foothold in an international market is a fundamental business strategy. The TCF industries of Portugal have an export performance that can be described as a Europeanisation of production. In 1990, for example, the Portuguese TCF exported some 553 billion of goods to the rest of the European Union.<sup>21</sup> Most of this value was accounted for by clothing. The main destinations were Germany and France (accounting for 31% and 24% respectively of the total value of TCF exports). If the UK is included, then just three member states accounted for almost three-quarters of Portugal's TCF exports to the EU.

Given that there were just over 202,000 persons working in the Portuguese TCF in 1989<sup>22</sup> then a crude calculation shows that each of those workers was generating some 2.7 million of export production; a sum equivalent to approximately £11,250 per worker. This figure stands in contrast to the salaries being paid to the workers – including children. Even allowing for labour cost differences between areas, sectors and factories, this stands as a reminder of the profit being generated for the entrepreneurial minority at the expense of most manual adult and child workers.

17. European Commission, *Employment in Europe 1994*, Luxembourg: CoCs, 1994, p. 134.
18. *International Labour Office, Yearbook of Labour Statistics 1993*, Geneva: ILO, 1993, p. 980.
19. J. Palmeiras, "Portugal na lista negra", *O Pálio*, November 1994.
20. "Child-worker dies in explosion", *Anglo-Portuguese News*, 5 August 1993.
21. Instituto Nacional de Estatística, *Estatísticas do Comércio Externo 1990*, Lisbon: INE, 1991.
22. Instituto Nacional de Estatística, *Estatísticas Industriais*, Vol. II, *Industrias Transformadoras*, 1989, Lisbon: INE, 1992.

One of the dilemmas facing Portugal as it follows an ambitious modernisation programme is that of upgrading its traditional industries while trying to maintain a competitive edge in the European Union. Nowhere is that conflict more pronounced than in the TCF industries. Here, several small, independent, family-owned factories are attempting to operate alongside much larger and more modern, internationally competing companies. It has been suggested that the key to the successful growth of the less-developed factories is to improve the quality of their production.<sup>23</sup> This can be done by moving away from the mass market, low cost, staple production that has previously characterised the industry. However, this strategy has also been followed in Portugal at a cost of shedding labour. One way in which these small firms downsize is by keeping their manual, adult labour costs to an absolute minimum. When coupled with low levels of educational attainment among poverty affected families<sup>24</sup> this process has led almost inevitably to an illegal use of child workers. Put simply, the fact that a child can be hired even more cheaply than an adult worker is a very persuasive consideration.

In spatial terms, most productive TCF employment is polarised into north-western littoral and eastern interior counties of Portugal. Five sub-sectors (artificial fibres, clothes-making, woollen fibres, knitwear, and footwear) account for over 90 per cent of all Portuguese employment in this industry. The north-western coastal *distritos* of Oporto, Braga and Aveiro dominate, together with Guarda and Castelo Branco in the central eastern interior. Moreover, the sub-sectoral breakdown shows that certain industrial activities are concentrated into specific areas. For example, over one half (52%) of Portugal's shoemaking workforce is located in Aveiro, and 47 per cent of all knitwear jobs are found in the county of Braga. Such a spatial concentration reflects the mono-industrial nature of many local development areas in Portugal. It also shows that these traditional TCF manufacturing locations have remained entrenched despite the recent country-wide onset of recessionary conditions. That entrenchment, in turn, displays the resilient nature of the factory owners involved, and the flexibility of the local TCF labour market in its continued use of unregulated employees. If we go back to the position at the end of the 1980s, Table 2 shows that there were almost 12,000 fourteen to eighteen year old Portuguese workers officially employed in the five TCF sub-sectors mentioned. Two thirds of that total were employed in two counties, Braga and Oporto. Fourteen years was the minimum working age in 1989. Eighteen years is now used as a cutoff because according to current Portuguese labour laws employers are only compelled to pay the minimum working wage (MWW - approximately £210 per month in Autumn 1994<sup>25</sup>) when a worker reaches this age. While we cannot directly link the distribution of these workers with those of underage labour, it is nevertheless an indicator of potential exploitation. Clearly, if employers are not compelled to pay the poor MWW to those under eighteen, then few are likely to do so. It is also probable that many workers appearing 'on the books' at eighteen will have been with their employer for a much longer period. Many will have started work as illegal youngsters (i.e. before they were fourteen) having been introduced to the factory by their parents. Consequently, it can be strongly assumed that Table 2 shows the Portuguese spatial pattern for the employment of childworkers in the TCF industries.

23. M. Eaton, "The Industrialisation of Textile and Clothing Firms in Central Portugal", *ACIS Journal*, 4(2), 1991, pp. 47-57.
24. A. B. da Costa, "The Measurement of Poverty in Portugal", *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 4(2), 1994, pp. 95-115.
25. "Portugal: 1996 Social Pact Agreed", *European Industrial Relations Review*, 267, 1996, pp. 18-19.

Given the significance of child working in Portugal it is important to explain why the phenomenon has persisted. From a theoretical perspective, Portuguese labour markets can be considered segmented. Labour as a commodity will in

26. "Abuse of child labour reaches new high", *Algarve News*, 4 June 1993.

### Reasons for the persistence of working children

Information provided by the PLD in the Autumn of 1994 revealed that the detection figure of 177 children was up almost three times on the same period for 1992. This suggested two things: that the incidence of child labour was steadily worsening or that more intensified inspections by the PLD were bringing greater success. The real explanation is probably a combination of the two, but the point remains that these detections are the tip of a large iceberg. The PLD is still afflicted by problems such as a lack of funds, overwork, underpayment, alleged corruption, and low morale. Furthermore, factories are moving children into private homes to carry out piecework; these companies are well organised and cooperate with each other rather than with the authorities. Once it is known that PLD inspectors are investigating an area, for example, word spreads and the children become part of a 'hidden economy', which the PLD struggles to penetrate.

An examination of the incidence of child-worker detections by the Portuguese authorities broadly confirms the patterns outlined in the previous section. To go back to Table 1, around 67 per cent of all twelve to fourteen year olds shown to be working in 1991 were found in the northern region of Portugal. Moreover, and using figures produced by the Portuguese Labour Department (PLD), in the first quarter of 1993, 177 children were detected.<sup>26</sup> The majority were found in the north-western counties of Oporto, (50%), Braga (27%), Viana do Castelo (12%), and Aveiro (8%).

### Detection of Portugal's child workers

Table 2. Sub-sectoral breakdown of under-18-year-old workers - 1989.

COUNTRY		Source: INE (1992)													
COUNTRY	TOTAL	Textile and Clothing Sub-sector													
		Cotton/Artl	Synth	Fibres	Knitwear	Footwear	Knitwear	Footwear	Knitwear	Footwear	Knitwear	Footwear	Knitwear	Footwear	Knitwear
Aveiro	1272	17	52	566	12	13	475	1063	154	533	996	557	1272	1272	1272
Braga	2220	872	368	52	566	12	13	475	1063	154	533	996	557	1272	1272
Castelo Branco	284	-	-	36	251	54	33	-	-	-	-	90	284	284	284
Coimbra	608	3	4	10	569	-	-	7	35	-	-	20	608	608	608
Guarda	38	-	-	1	5	12	30	6	3	-	-	19	38	38	38
Leiria	197	-	-	1	73	6	9	14	38	19	77	40	197	197	197
Lisbon	249	-	-	13	167	5	0	23	70	7	12	48	249	249	249
Oporto	2773	587	297	206	1563	12	0	111	405	300	508	1216	2773	2773	2773
Sanitatem	45	-	-	0	13	-	-	14	32	-	-	14	45	45	45
Setúbal	78	-	-	4	68	0	1	1	10	-	-	5	78	78	78
Viana do Castelo	29	13	29	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	29	29	29
Viseu	100	-	-	5	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	100	100	100
Portugal	1481	709	345	3602	107	90	655	1713	1124	1875	3712	7989	1481	1481	1481

many semi-industrialised rural areas offer flexibility, and ready compliance with the controlling influence of family management.<sup>27</sup> The rigidities of Fordist manufacturing patterns have, therefore, been replaced by a desire to bypass acceptable labour market practices. Two factors help to illustrate this trend. First, we have to acknowledge the debilitating impact of adult unemployment. After Portugal joined the EU in 1986 official unemployment remained around the 5 per cent level. However, by the end of 1994 it had reached 6.8 per cent,<sup>28</sup> and with the increase came significant spatial impacts. Lisbon, Oporto and Setúbal have been the main urban areas to suffer from recent job loss. Important pockets of TCF industrial activity in the Ave Valley, northeast of Oporto, and around Covilha in the eastern interior have also been adversely affected. According to the UGT, the worst hit sector was the textile fibres industry where around 20% of workers were laid-off in 1993.

Not surprisingly, therefore, these areas have rendered themselves vulnerable to the collapse of an individual sector of TCF activity. The division of labour in these areas has been affected because of that vulnerability. In this situation, some TCF companies have argued that their own problems (and those of the local area) can be partially offset by laying off 'expensive' adult workers, and increasing the number of 'cheaper' child workers. One can, therefore, begin to understand why these small-scale and independent factories are so willing to use these controversial, but also perhaps economically vital, young employees. These are workers who because of financial expediency employers are reluctant to 'dismiss'. It is the willingness, therefore, to be flexible and respond to economic pressures by the employers that is a major factor in the survival of child labour in these areas.

A second factor is that of wage arrears.<sup>29</sup> Many factories are guilty of either not paying their workers, and/or not being able to fulfill their social security requirements. In June 1993, the UGT claimed that almost 24,000 workers were waiting for their salaries to be paid. The worst hit areas were again the northern counties of Braga (one quarter of the total number of workers) and Oporto (a further 25%). Because of its nefarious nature, the following point is difficult to prove. However, if adult workers were not being paid then it is highly likely that the youngsters who might be employed by these factories were also not being paid. In this situation, child working in Portugal is at its most extreme form of exploitation. The child has been downgraded from a poor position of having a job and being paid a small sum of escudos to one of having a job and being paid nothing at all. The labour market relationship is prejudiced because, again, the employer gains the bonus of cutting labour costs and enhancing company profit-margins while the child continues to suffer.

The scale of Portugal's child-working issue is now becoming clearer and the differences in the views of the key players are complicated and occasionally contradictory. Given these differing opinions it is perhaps not surprising to find that fresh initiatives to change the Portuguese situation have, to date, been limited.

### Contemporary responses to child working in Portugal

Since 1992, the Portuguese Government has tried more strenuously to solve the issue. They have also attempted to relieve some of the political embarrassment caused by the phenomenon of child labour. In January 1992, the minimum working age was raised from fourteen to fifteen, and in 1997 Portugal fell in line

- 27, P. Cooke, "Labour Market Discontinuity and Spatial Development", *Progress in Human Geography*, 7, 1983, pp. 545-566; D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.
- 28, International Labour Office, *Bulletin of Labour Statistics*, Geneva: ILO, 1995, p. 65.
- 29, "Portugal: Pay Arrears/Child Labour", *European Industrial Relations Review*, 184, 1989, p. 8.



problem. First, there is a need to convince local populations by stressing the

Nevertheless, it can be argued that there are two keys to the solution of the conflict is not close at hand.

such deep-seated attitudes, clearly a resolution of the Portuguese child-working subsumed by a much greater desire to work and be financially productive. With their family. Peer pressure may be strong and the risks of exploitation may be gain greater self-esteem by working, while others may feel compelled to support wrong in letting their children go out to work. The children themselves may by a factory because they themselves were child workers. They see nothing NGOs portray. Often, the parents of child workers accept the conditions imposed as a 'legitimate' response to recessionary crisis and not the moral dilemma that well organised against disruption by officialdom. Many firms see child working Those efforts have resulted in mixed success. As we have seen, the factories are conditions that have traditionally forced families to send youngsters out to work. key export industries by overseas buyers. It has also tried to alleviate the social sensitive to the issue, being careful to assuage a potential boycott of several of its complicated by the nature of the various interests involved. The Government is The dilemma facing each player in Portugal with respect to child labour is

### Discussion: A way forward?

is exerted.

clandestine characteristic is unlikely to be altered in the future unless more pressure Arguably, the factories are using a secret workforce to generate profits and that minors in Portugal, not all have accepted that there is proof of this happening. UK high street retailers have been named as benefiting from the employment of As an exercise in damage limitation this has been a useful strategy. While several threatened to suspend contracts if it is proven that the firms are using childworkers. American companies have warned their Portuguese suppliers. They have programmes broadcast in the UK, France and Germany, several British and a proactive response to child labour allegations. As a reaction to several television Some foreign companies with subcontracting links in Portugal have adopted Government's lack of consultation with their respective bodies.

step towards alleviating the problem. Both organisations complained about the Confederation Against Child Labour considered the campaign to be a first positive level education at the national scale. However, the Portuguese National penalties for convicted companies, and wanted more funds devoted to secondary to adopt a much tougher line. The UGT, for example, had asked for increases in unions were generally dismissive of its potential, having urged the government The campaign received a mixed response.<sup>30</sup> Discussions showed that trade dreary means of earning money and helping to support their family.

Such an approach stands in contrast to a job being seen by the children as just a better quality education their working life could be a pleasurable experience. between the ages of six and fifteen. The aim was to make them aware that with social attitudes towards, and among childworkers. The campaign targeted children Up'. Using the slogan 'Studying is Working Too', they attempted to change Government unveiled an educational campaign called: 'Give Them Time to Grow reeducate their parents. In Summer 1993, for example, the Portuguese new initiatives have been introduced designed to educate school children and to with the rest of the EU where the minimum age is sixteen. Additionally, several

30. *Anti Slavery International, Portugal's Child Workforce, Anti Slavery Reporter*, VIII (2), 1, 1996, p.5.

value of an enhanced primary, junior and secondary school education. However, such a move would first require a major overhaul of much of the Portuguese education system. It would also need more local developments in areas particularly afflicted by the child labour problem. Such a task, given that one in five of over fifteen year olds in Portugal is illiterate,<sup>32</sup> is likely to be a difficult one. It is, however, a situation that requires urgent attention, not least because illiteracy can only endanger the child-workers still further and expose them to ever greater levels of exploitation.

Second, and perhaps more significantly, there is a need to change the outlook of the factory owners themselves. Traditionally, Portuguese manufacturing industries have reaped the advantages associated with low labour costs and the illegal use of underage workers. Inevitably, in a European Union that is seeking to standardise minimum wage levels and life-quality standards, those comparative advantages will continue to be eroded away. In that situation, the advantages of well-educated children, possessing the necessary skills to be able to work effectively in more modern Portuguese factories, have to be promoted.

In addition, a major quality drive is required for manufacturing industry. There is a need to instill in companies the idea that Portuguese industry can be sustained on the quality of goods produced. The simplistic idea of maintaining cheap labour costs within an individual firm through the exploitation of children is no longer valid. The high levels of exports being achieved by the Portuguese TCF are generating profits which must be rigorously reinvested. Factories must update machinery, improve stock control, use better marketing expertise to rejuvenate and enhance their export, and indeed their domestic, performances. Simply to rely on cutting costs and using cheap child labour is not an acceptable way of doing business in today's European Union. Portuguese TV and other forms of media have a responsibility to ensure wider publicity for the plight of the working children. Similarly, the Portuguese Government should move away from its defensive posture and adopt a proactive role in bringing all the key players together for meaningful negotiations.

Clearly, these latter suggestions point to a long-term solution. However, if one accepts that only those factories willing to modernise their production strategies towards higher quality goods<sup>32</sup> are going to survive, then one must look to the enlightened leaders to set an example. One such key player is the Swedish-owned, Tranemo Textile factory based in Almada, south of Lisbon. Tranemo is different from other Portuguese textile factories, not because it employs almost 450 women workers, but because it offers a support centre for their children. When the factory was built in 1980, the construction included provision for an on-site nursery school. In addition, Tranemo now supports a local primary school by financing meals for the children, many of whose parents work in the factory. Significantly, it has been claimed that provision of daily nourishment motivates a child to attend school regularly and this incentive often eradicates truancy completely. In this favourable situation, children are less likely to remove themselves from the school to look for work. As a result of Tranemo's policy to pay 'above-average' wages and provide better working conditions, there has been less need for children to be sent out to work. Given this environment, the company has revealed that children who attended Tranemo's nursery school have moved on to primary and junior schools with higher than normal pass

31. D. Corkill, *The Portuguese Economy since 1974*, Edinburgh University Press, 1993.
32. S. Syrett, "A Recipe for Disaster? The Portuguese Food Industry and the Single European Market", unpublished paper, September 1994.

marks in examinations. This strategy has, therefore, resulted in some tangible measure of success and offers opportunities for replication elsewhere. While it would be naive to envisage Tranemo's scheme becoming a model for all of Portugal's clothes-making factories, there are pointers to a better future. If the economic, social and educational conditions in a local area are more to the benefit of the local workers and their children, the 'need' to send children out to work may be diminished. In that way, improvements to the standards of education of Portuguese children may be achieved. By the end of the century, many children who might have become workers could still be at school. Such a strategy does not immediately help those child-workers who are currently employed and exploited. However, extending the principles behind the Tranemo scheme to other factories and, indeed, other sectors of activity, could well signal a step in the right direction.

Clearly, the causes of child-working in Portugal are not straightforward and the answers are equally difficult to formulate. It is an issue that requires careful management geared to local circumstances. We have suggested that if child workers are removed from the labour market then the competitive advantage enjoyed by Portuguese manufacturers will be eroded. However, if the Portuguese authorities continue to ignore the fact that children are being exploited then they run the risk of being rejected by the rest of the EU. Such rejection would, in turn, jeopardise the extensive aid packages that have already helped Portugal's economic development process.<sup>33</sup> In the end, it could be to Portugal's advantage if the current Socialist Government were to seize the initiative and attempt to curtail child working. In doing so they may guarantee the future of the European Union's assistance, education could be improved, illiteracy rates reduced. Moreover, young workers would be better trained, and more suited to entering a factory at the age of sixteen. Perhaps most significantly, working children would start to become unwelcome reminders of the past.

### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank several anonymous Portuguese officials and interviewees for their help in the compilation of this article. Financial assistance was provided by the British Council/NICT in Lisbon. However, all opinions and errors remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

33. M. Eaton, "Regional Development Funding in Portugal", *ACIS Journal*, 7 (2), 1994, pp.36-46.